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Social Workers: Their Role and Relationship With the People They Serve

Sheila Moriarty
Augsburg College

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Social workers:

Their role and relationship
with the people they serve

Sheila Moriarty

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Social Work

AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

2000

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

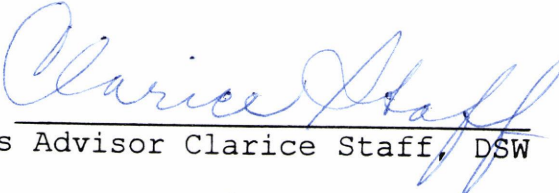
This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

Sheila Moriarty

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis
requirement for the Master of Social Work Degree.

Date of Oral Presentation: 6/21/99

Thesis Committee:


Thesis Advisor Clarice Staff, DSW


Thesis Reader Maria Dinis, Ph.D


Thesis Reader Cynthia Packer, MSW

DEDICATION

This thesis project is dedicated to:

Terrance Emmett Moriarty

January, 15,1940- January 18,1999

He was pushing for me to do graduate education before I even finished high school. For 12 years I resisted that idea. When I finally decided to give it a try, I made sure that he was the first one I called.

Throughout the two years I was at Augsburg, he was very supportive and enthusiastic even as his own health was failing. From the beginning I was devising plans on how to make sure that he would enjoy my graduation. But none of this ended up being possible. And so to my father, I acknowledge with appreciation the tremendous work he put into being with us as long as he was able.

And, as always, I remain my father's daughter.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take an opportunity to thank some deserving people who have supported me tremendously on this long and fascinating journey through graduate school.

I would like to thank my thesis and academic advisor, Dr. Clarice Staff. She has been willing to meet with me on my schedule and at my convenience. She has been supportive, compassionate and patient through a great deal of anxiety, confusion, and grief.

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I thank my neighbors, Amy Anderson and Karen Hummer, who have been extremely patient and supportive.

For my mother, Marlys Ann Moriarty, an acknowledgment is not enough. She has always been remarkable in her ability to do everything. In the last two years, she has elevated herself to superhuman. And despite her own extreme pain, she always found time to be supportive to me.

Thesis Abstract

Social Workers:

Their Role and Relationship with
the People They Serve

A Hermeneutics study

Sheila Moriarty

2000

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions that social service workers have of their role and relationship with the people they serve. This study explored these questions of role and relationship through stories told by the social service workers about their work. The literature review reveals that there has been little research looking at the role and relationship with people using the stories of social service workers. Postmodernism and its challenge to the social service worker role as expert is the conceptual framework for this thesis. The research method is hermeneutics. It recognizes the legitimacy of lived experience as told through stories. The findings indicate that social service workers value strong connections to and relationships with the people they serve.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the last century, people within the field of social work have searched for a professional identity. From the very beginning, there has been a diversity of opinion about the mission and goals of social work practice. Two of the great founding mothers of social work had very different visions about the mission of social work. Jane Addams saw social work as educated humanism which brought culture to the poor while Mary Richmond called for social work to have a scientific foundation that would define the elements of this work (Goldstein, 1992).

One hundred years later, this search continues. Today, there is a great number of theories that inform the practice of social workers. And these theories continue to multiply as the discourse around social work identity continues. Within these many theories today, there is as much divergence in philosophy as there was between the social work of Jane Addams and the social work of Mary Richmond at the turn of the century. Much of this debate and discussion throughout this century has been about the mission and method of social work practice.

Statement of Problem

The social work of today has gone through quite a metamorphosis. Jane Addams and Mary Richmond would not fully recognize the social work that has grown out of their individual visions of educated humanism and social casework. While there is some diversity of role and room for new ideas within the social work profession, much of the profession has become tightly structured within complex and deep bureaucratic systems. These often unwieldy systems require that people be categorized and labeled so that the enormous amount of work that is assumed by these systems can stay organized. The concept of the individual as complex and unique has little place in this organizational structure. The behavior and needs of people are described by these structures in ways that are general and psychological. And it is important that the clients of these systems fit within existing categories of diagnosis and of service.

Significance of Problem

One important debate is the one that centers around social work as a modernist discipline versus social work as a postmodernist discipline (Gorman, 1993).

In modern social work, the focus is on "truths" that are assumed in the expertise of the social worker and of psychological constructs. The modernist concept of social workers as an expert in the lives of people is challenged by the postmodernist concept of social work which sees the worker as a supporter of people's intrinsic knowledge and the experience of their own lives. The concepts of culture and meaning are discussed and the social service systems that use Eurocentric constructs of family structures and values are challenged (Pozatek, 1994).

This debate has significant implications for the future of social work. There are agencies that offer postmodern perspective as well as agencies that continue to work with people from the perspective of modern thought. The variety allows social workers to broaden their views about how this work can be done. The diversity of ideas can also help social workers decide what role they will play in the lives of the people with whom they work. It will help decide how social workers see their clients and the issues that they face.

Postmodern Framework

This review will offer insight into the research

related to postmodernism within the field of social work. The purpose will be to explore the implications of postmodernism and the theories and practice which extend themselves from this philosophy to the practice of social services. The postmodern framework is explored through the research method of hermeneutics which will explore the complexity and legitimacy of people's stories.

Researcher's Background

Within the methodology of hermeneutics is the belief that a person's background or history has a direct effect on his or her understanding of the world. This belief would include the history of the researcher's background for it will impact how they interpret and view this research. It is important that the reader has a sense of the researcher's frame of reference by learning a little about who I am and what my history is with Social Service Workers.

This research is conducted by a white, middle-class single woman who is thirty-five years old. I have almost completed my Master's Degree in Social Work from Augsburg College.

I have twelve years of experience working in the field

of social services. Primarily, I have worked with adolescents who are at risk for running away or are homelessness, and their families. My twelve years of service have been a tremendous education. During that time, I have spent a great deal of time thinking about the relationship between the Social Service Worker and the people they serve. At times I have felt very helpful to others, and at other times I have experienced a feeling that I have been not helpful or even oppressive. I am uncomfortable with the parts of my relationship that feels oppressive to others. I have tried to shape my career so that I would be a part of organizations that were respectful and useful with those they serve. Still I have been curious to hear the voices of other social service workers to know if they have also struggled with the relationship they have with those they serve.

Research Question

This review of literature looks at postmodernism and how it plays a part in reshaping how social service workers view their ideas about role and relationship with clients. The question for research is related to the approach of postmodernism.

The research question is aimed at how social service work is perceived today by those who practice. What do social service workers believe to be their role as advocates for the people they serve? How do social service workers see their relationships with clients? What do they want these relationships to be?

The stories of social service workers will be used rather than licensed social workers in this study as there is only one licensed social worker in the pool of participants used for this research. The literature review will look primarily at research on social workers as that is where the most useful information is found. The questions will explore and deconstruct the perspective of the social service worker. The questions are designed to view the social service worker's perspective as legitimate and valuable to the research. The qualitative types of research hold many fascinating possibilities for social work practice. The qualitative interview method of hermeneutics will be used as the research method. Hermeneutics is an interview method that allows for the richness of storytelling as a means of clarifying the worker's experience with client and as a service provider. The depth of meaning to the data gives much on which to

reflect as social service workers. The research proposed for this thesis is designed to gather information from social service workers about their work. Four service providers were interviewed; these practitioners offer services to youth and families in a large urban area in the upper midwest. Two of these providers were administrators while the other two were direct service providers. Their belief about the meaning of social work and their roles as social service workers was explored. The purpose will be to explore their relationships with clients and what role they should play in the lives of clients.

This design will bring further clarification of the possible implications for postmodern social work practice. Successful outcomes of service as defined by the social service worker can be explored. This information could give social service workers a better idea of the expectations and the possibilities of the relationship between social service workers and the community they serve.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

This literature review will be focused in a few areas.

First, there will be a look at the literature written on the relationship between workers and those they serve.

This literature leads us to the ideals of postmodernism and what they mean for the role of the worker in the lives of people. And then there is a look at the research methods that work best for the postmodern desire to appreciate the complexity and the uniqueness of each individual.

Workers and People They Serve

Biestek (1994) describes the relationship that workers have with their clients as the soul of casework. "As the life-giving principle, it vivifies every part of casework and makes the whole a warmly human helping experience" (Biestek, 630).

The relationship that a worker has with those they serve is both an important and a complex one. Social workers are trying to balance a role of nurturer with one of authority or teacher or, perhaps, mentor. The role that the worker assumes can depend largely on the theory from

which the worker is practicing.

Most of the articles reviewed came from some diversity of perspective. Yet they all saw the relationship that a worker has with a client as crucial to good social work. And all articles had surprisingly similar ideas on the role of the worker in this relationship. These articles span more than a forty-year period of time. Biestek's classic text from 1957 saw the worker as having seven accountabilities to the relationship with a client. These accountabilities include the recognition of the dignity and equality of the client, the uniqueness of the client, and the right of the individual to make their own decisions in life. Compare these to an article of a similar subject by Hartman in 1998 and one will find that many of the same themes emerge despite the fact that Hartman sees casework from the perspective of postmodernism while Biestek sees casework from a more traditional context.

Three articles (Hartman, 1998; Durst, 1994; Swenson, 1998) see the worker's traditional role as an expert as being problematic in establishing a strong relationship with the client. Durst (1994) believes that a relationship where worker is expert in the lives of others causes resentment and suspicion in the client. All three

authors believe what should happen between the worker and the client would be a partnering relationship.

Hartman (1998) believes that the production of truth begets power. If the worker is the holder of truth then they are the holders of power as well. "Social workers must reflect on the extent to which we may unwittingly and well meaningly disempower our clients through our role as expert through the authority of our knowledge" (p. 483).

Swenson (1998) shares much of this perception that the voice of the client is often not legitimized by the worker, and she broadens this oppression to include the forces of society. She calls for workers to examine their position as an expert, and to work with clients as partners in addressing the societal justice issues that are impacting these clients.

These recent articles focus on postmodern theories and the ability of these theories to see people in their own context as they describe themselves. This relinquishing of the role of expert is seen as critical to the growth of the relationship between the worker and the client.

The next part of the literature review takes a look at a description of postmodernism and how it impacts this work.

Postmodernism in Social Service Work

The practice of social service work has gone through many different phases. Community work began the profession through the efforts of friendly visitors going into inner city neighborhoods of the 19th century. With the influx of impoverished peoples and immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century, there came a need to organize the work of offering relief and services (Goldstein, 1992). Trattner (1994) states that rapid industrialization, widespread immigration, and the advent of capitalism caused an overcrowding of the labor force into cities. These centers of population were ugly, cramped, and unsanitary. It was believed that a group of social experts should intervene to create some order to this chaos and to alleviate suffering.

Mary Richmond of the Charities Organization Societies was one of the founders of the profession of social work. She began the process of coordinating and evaluating the needs of those seeking services (Specht & Courtney, 1994). From that process, case work became highly defined. It became important to gather a great deal of information, and then use that information to decide whether or not a person was entitled to receive service

(Goldstein, 1990).

Social work relied on the constructs of psychotherapy to make decisions about what was ailing a person. This science assumed that social work could determine truths about people by gathering information and using that information to diagnose dysfunction. Much of this structure is known today as the modernist perspective of social work.

In contrast, postmodernism is a theory that challenges the notions of social work as a science. It emerged in the 1950's as a critique of the modernist view of social work.

This critique centers around the modernist views on what constitutes "truths" in social work. Social work procedures tend to privilege the conclusions of professional as "truths" about clients despite the thoughts and conclusions of the clients themselves. Postmodernism contends that there is a legitimacy to a client's voice and what they know about themselves which is often discounted in the conclusions drawn by the professional (Banks & Mangan, 1994).

Postmodernism explores complexity in people's lives and assumes that these complexities make it impossible to know truths about lives other than our own. It assumes

that there can be many perspectives and realities to any situation (Gorman, 1993). A person's life experiences are complex, rich, and filled with infinite information unique to that individual. Postmodernism asserts that another person, even a "professional," can not have enough understanding of that complexity to be able to adequately pronounce "truths" about another person's life (Banks & Mangan, 1994).

In postmodernism, there is a belief that diagnoses and labels actually obscure or submerge meanings that are equally relevant (Saleeby, 1994). Another important belief is that the dominant culture defines what is "normal" and "acceptable" for families in society, thereby overshadowing and ignoring the family definitions pronounced by other cultures in the society (Kelley, 1995).

The teaching of therapeutic endeavors in academic institutions has been mono-cultural, deeply embedded in modern North American and Western European ideas. Ideas about individual and family development, about relationships between people, and even about causality vary among cultures (Waldegrave, C., 1990, p.23).

Postmodern social work seeks to bring awareness to the concept that the dominant culture and ideas have oppressive effects on the realities and truths of other cultures. This philosophy of social work also seeks to encourage the "local knowledge" of peoples whose realities or narratives have been suppressed (Saleeby, 1994).

Postmodern Research

Postmodernism by definition does not lend itself easily to traditional research methods. It is a theory based on the ever evolving and infinite possibilities that exist within human beings. This definition is antithetical to the idea of positivism or objective scientific inquiry that has defined most of social work research up to this point. Banks and Mangan (1994) state that the advent of postmodernist thought has raised many concerns about the use of positivism in social research. Some have responded to these concerns with the adoption of more interpretive methods of research.

The interpretive methods of research allow for the emergence of uniqueness and complexity both of which are important to postmodernism. This research focuses on the story of the client as told by the client. From the

client's stories, there will emerge an appropriate description of what is happening and what would be helpful to that client. It is believed that the social service worker can learn everything that will be useful in assisting the client by listening and learning about the family and its culture, strengths, traditions, history of struggle and triumph, and definitions (White, 1997).

Qualitative research that is interpretive in nature has been widely used for studies related to postmodernism. This type of research can focus on discovering the complexity of a person (Rubin & Babbie, 1997).

Interpretative Methods of Research

Postmodernist thought challenges the modernist or positivist tradition of research. Banks and Mangan (1994) state that "concepts of postmodern social inquiry challenge the monolithic authority of traditional scientific paradigms, and insist upon the importance of the local and particular" (p.71).

Postmodernism expects the researcher to use more interpretative methods of research. Rubin and Babbie (1997) describe interpretivism as a paradigm that contrasts with positivism. Earlier, positivism was described as a

theory connected to scientific objectivity. Interpretivist researchers seek, on the other hand, to gain an understanding of how people feel and think. They are looking for the deeper meaning to questions about people by attempting to see and hear things from the participant's point of view.

This type of research recognizes that the most quantitative forms of research cannot fully escape the subjectivity of the researcher. Both postmodernism and interpretative research understand that "all theories embody values" (Swenson, p.530). Swenson goes on to explain that even researchers "filter data through the lens of their own experiences, values, and prior knowledge" (p.530).

Positionality is a concept that is important to hermeneutics. Positionality requires that the researcher examines their own beliefs, biases, and values, and considers how they may affect the interpretation of the interview.

Ethnography, hermeneutics, and narrative are examples of interpretive research. Ethnography is a research method that asks researchers to immerse themselves in the culture of those being studied. The interviewee is not seen as a

subject but rather as co-researcher (O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, & Schuman, 1997). Narrative research is the exploration of the subject's story, allowing for complex and varied responses while hermeneutics is the search for the deeper meanings within stories given to the researcher.

Pozatek (1994) defines hermeneutics as "the art of deciphering indirect meaning" (p.400).

A few studies have used these methods as a way of conducting social work research. All of these studies talked with participants about their satisfaction with social services they received. These services ranged from those provided by a runaway shelter to neighborhood planning to narrative therapy experience. All studies (Banks & Wideman, (1996), Forte, (1994), Karabanow & Rains, (1997), O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, & Schuman, (1997), Sohng, (1996), Vodde & Gallant(1995)) found that interesting and sometimes surprising narratives emerged when people had a chance to talk with clarity about their stories. O'Connor, etal (1997) see this type of research as a means of narrowing the gap between research and practice. There is the connection of actually using practice stories as the framework for the research.

It is interesting to note that all of these studies

were conducted within the last five years. It suggests that the profession of social work is just beginning to use and understand hermeneutics as a type of inquiry in research. Sohng (1996) worries that this type of participatory research is not a true science. He suggests that by the nature of its subjectivity, it is fallible. However, he does note that the complex themes do bring richness to the work we do.

It would be interesting to see what evolves through these types of qualitative research in social work over the long term. These studies are not only recent but they are brief in duration with a small sample. While hermeneutics and ethnography are time consuming processes, the richness of the data collected makes it an important research method for the study of social work.

Postmodernism with Clients

Many authors (Goldstein (1990), Goldstein (1992), Gorman (1993), Kelley (1995), Laird (1993), Saleeby (1994), and Turner(1996)) indicate the gathering of narratives and stories from clients is a sensitive and respectful way of working with clients. These stories can then be used to construct solutions and possibilities for people. Kelley

(1995), Sands & Nuccio(1992) and Turner (1996) also identify postmodern techniques as especially sensitive in work with clients of non-European cultures.

Narrative therapy is culturally sensitive because it does not presume a way of being, but aims to understand the client's reality. The therapist listens for ways in which gender, culture, and social and economic context may shape the client's world view (Turner, 1996. p.46).

Wood (1997) advances the view that postmodernism challenges the social worker's use of critical thinking in their work. This is an important exercise for social workers, many of whom have been trained to analyze clients only within existing modern frameworks of knowledge.

There are concerns in the literature about postmodernism and its usefulness. Some case studies are used to describe these postmodern approaches and how they can be useful. However these case studies invariably speak from the viewpoint of the therapist rather than reporting the experience from the perspective of the client. This is an odd approach for postmodern theory that prides itself on not making decisions for those served.

Another concern about postmodernism is the complexity

of the discourse that focuses on the ever potential depth of meaning to language. The language used to describe postmodernism is often esoteric and not easily understood by all. Wood (1997) describes the language of postmodernism as exclusive to those of the socially mobile intelligentsia and therefore inaccessible to many of the oppressed populations it seeks to liberate.

Waldegrave(1998) is conducting one of the first long term qualitative studies which looks at women's stories of their experiences with social services from a modern perspective as well as from postmodern stance. More of these narrative studies would reveal much of the complexity in the relationship between the social worker and those they serve. There would also be the potential for information about what clients find helpful. Social workers could learn that there is a great deal of diversity as to how clients are defining the role of the social worker in their lives.

Conceptual Framework

What has been described so far through the literature review is a concern for the future of social work as a profession, and how social workers do and potentially do

not serve those in need. The problem centers around the idea that while this is a profession historically rooted in social and personal service, the current structures and role of social work are often impersonal and not empathetic to those being served.

The philosophy of postmodernism is chosen for this framework precisely because it advocates for personal and individualized attention to the clients served. In postmodernism, language and meaning as defined by the client is central to the understanding that social workers develop about a client's reality. There is a focus on the subjective self, and a belief that relevant information can come from the discourses of this subjective self (Mitchell, 1996). This is one of the ways in which postmodernism differs.

Compare this with the philosophy of modernism where it is believed that human order can essentially be governed by general principles of science. Therefore, people can be liberated from social issues by meta-narratives that can logically explain the truths of human behavior (Mitchell, 1996). These meta-narratives or "grand narratives" are of concern to some postmodern philosophers. Philosopher Lyotard (1984) suggests that these grand narratives or

"absolute knowledge" about humanity obscure other versions of reality and are therefore oppressive. Often these other versions of reality represent cultures, genders or belief systems that are other than those of the dominant culture. Postmodernism seeks to honor these obscured discourses as having just as much basis in truth as those of the dominant discourses. A postmodern framework does not have a structure that is either rigid or static. There is argument about whether a structure can exist in postmodernism at all. What does exist can evolve and adjust according to the language and the story of the participant in the research.

There are some constant parts to this framework. The participant's narrative must always be central to an understanding of the reality of the story. The meanings within the language of the story should never be assumed. Meanings should be explored within a variety of different contexts such as: culture, generations, gender, and history. There are always alternative narratives to the one given. And the narrative of the participant is fluid. It is a perception of one moment in time.

Adhering to the postmodern framework ensures that the experiences of participants are central to the researcher's

perception of reality. This framework is connected by these constants. It is also able to adjust and evolve according to the meaning of the participants.

When looking for a research method for a postmodern inquiry, it seems logical to think about hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is connected to postmodern thought. The language and meaning of the participants in hermeneutic research is central to understanding just as it is in many postmodern therapies (e.g., narrative or social justice therapy).

Some of the central tenets of hermeneutics connect directly to the postmodern framework. As mentioned above, hermeneutics focuses on the central importance of language. Allen (1995) describes language as "both the medium and product of human culture" (p.176).

Another tenet is the emphasis on the role of history in understanding language. The history of the language has context that can speak to social position or possible marginalized status. Knowing the history of language gives a linguistic context for a participant's narrative (Allen, 1995).

The meaning of language is wrapped within the histories and traditions of the reader and the interpreter.

Because of this, the context of those collective experiences will become part of any meaning that is assigned to a narrative (Allen, 1995).

The production of language is most often the domain of those in power. The voices of the dominant culture often obscure those voices of other cultures. Not only are voices obscured, but the power differential can distort what voice is able to emerge.

These tenets of hermeneutics fit well within a postmodern inquiry. The research method of hermeneutics and the conceptual framework of postmodernism work together to explore and deconstruct the narrative of participants. This is the framework and the method with which the research of this thesis will be done.

Application of Hermeneutics to

Study of Postmodernism

It can be assumed that hermeneutics seeks to interpret the voice of the participant. The participant and their perceptions are legitimate and important (Sherman, 1987). This research method then requires a conceptual framework that recognizes the legitimacy of an individual's reality despite a larger meta-narrative from the dominant culture.

The questions chosen for the interviews are open-ended and are seeking stories of lived experience. Like the techniques of narrative therapy that is postmodern, what is sought are themes in the stories told in the hermeneutics interview. The researcher is interested in the language of the participant and how the story unfolds. By honoring the language and the structure of the story, the researcher can further offer legitimacy to the reality of the participant.

The interpretations or analysis of the interview will further preserve the participant's meanings by interpreting the story using as much of the participant's language as possible. "Naming" or "coding" is used to determine the themes that are discussed in the analysis. This practice continues to regard the importance of language and its meanings which are so important both to the ideals of postmodernism and to hermeneutics. And finally the participants are asked to critique the summary interpretations offered by the researcher. In doing so, the participant is able to protect their perceptions right up to the moment that their story is used as data.

Conclusion

Abraham Flexner began the debate about social work as a profession with scientific knowledge 85 years ago (Goldstein, 1990). Since then social work has worked to build frameworks of truth about humans, their relationships, and their behaviors.

The emergence of postmodernism challenges the notion of social work as a science. It discards the idea that social work can create frameworks that will fit everyone. Howard Goldstein (1990) suggests that we should drop the idea that social work can operate as a science and consider the idea of social work being an art form. This concept calls for social workers to never assume meaning and always search for depth within each individual situation.

None of these ideas really discards the tremendous role that science has had in social work. The use of scientific technique has been responsible for much of the development of social work practice over the last 100 years. Postmodernism merely adds complexity to the role of the social worker in practice offering a broadened perspective to the work.

While the move from science to art requires quite a drastic swing of the pendulum, it does call for social

workers to rethink their role as the expert and to consider themselves an actual participant in an ongoing process alongside the people they serve.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of this research centers around the role of social service work in the lives of people and how social service workers themselves define that role. The conceptual framework for this question is the theory of postmodernism allows for multiple realities to exist. Each person's reality has the potential to be rich in meaning, language, history, and culture that are specific to their own experiences. The literature review explores how each of these subjective realities has value and an equal claim on the concept of truth. Because of this, postmodernism is seen as a framework that is particularly useful in legitimizing social service workers' perceptions of their roles with the people they serve. This chapter contains the research question, research design, philosophical background, criteria and standards for conducting quality research, data collection, data analysis, standards for the protection of human subjects, and implications for practice.

Research Questions

The hermeneutics interview will focus on questions and stories designed to answer these three basic questions.

-What do social service workers believe to be their role as advocates for the people they serve?

-How do social service workers see (define) their relationships with clients?

-What do they want their relationships with clients to be?

Research Design and Philosophy

The research design is qualitative research which allows the researcher to explore the complexity within the human subjects studied. The research for this thesis allows for the depth of meaning that is sought in postmodernism.

Hermeneutics is a type of qualitative method that can be used to explore research questions in depth.

Hermeneutics is fairly new as a research method for social work. However, it does have a long history as an analysis method for the study of Bible readings.

The growing use of hermeneutics in social work and other disciplines has been seen as a reaction to

modernism's need to give a rational account of everything that happens (Bowers, 1993). In hermeneutics, researchers find that there are many different perspectives of knowledge. All of these different perspectives are seen to have the legitimacy of a "lived reality".

Much of the understanding and framework for the use of hermeneutics comes from the work of the philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heideggerian hermenutics looks to increase our understanding of the world not through the generation of more knowledge, but through learning about shared experiences, practices, and common meanings.

The two essential elements of Heidegger's philosophy were the historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic circle. To understand these ideas, it is important to understand the concepts of background, pre-understanding, co-constitution, and interpretation. These four concepts constitute parts of the hermeneutic circle. The concepts of the hermeneutic circle are important to understanding aspects of Heidegger's philosophy.

The hermeneutics circle is the idea that all understandings have fore-structures that are based both in the person trying to understand and the person being understood. These fore-structures are ongoing and cannot be

eliminated. They can only be modified. They are based on the ideas of pre-understanding, background, and co-constitution.

Background is the notion that the history of where a person comes from is what culture offers someone at birth. The history of background is given to a person and represents an understanding of reality for that person.

Pre-understanding is the meaning and organization of a culture that exists in the world before we are at a point in life of understanding. These understandings came before the birth of a person and therefore attaches itself to us through life.

Co-constitution is the idea that the person and their world are affecting each other at the same time. At the same time that the world around a person is helping to construct that person, that person is helping to construct the world. It is impossible to distinguish the contribution or understanding of the world from that of the person. There is an indissoluble unity.

Interpretation can only happen through referencing the background or history of that person. Historicity is a context necessary for the understanding of another person.

In hermeneutics, the understandings come not only from

the careful and accurate interpretations of what is currently happening, but the impact of what has come before (history) and how that has shaped what is happening (present). Thus there can be no meanings that are standard for all people.

Participants

The term participant will be used throughout this study. The term refers to the persons who have agreed to be interviewed for this research. Four participants were chosen for this study. They were identified from a list of criteria that brings them within the necessary framework for this study.

All of the participants were aware of my background and my beliefs about social service and working with clients. Through this awareness, they were able to understand the perspectives through which I heard their information.

The criteria used in choosing participants for this study were:

- All needed to be providers of social service
- All needed to be employees with a social service agency for youth.

-Two of the providers would do direct service with youth and families.

-Two of the providers would do administrative or indirect service to youth and families.

Criteria for Quality Research

Interpretative research generally does not lend itself well to the traditional forms of scientific criteria. Because of that, interpretative researchers have begun to develop criteria that fits the needs of this research. Lincoln (1995) offers eight criteria that begin to address the requirements of quality interpretative research.

1) Standards for judging quality- The criterion suggests nine guidelines to determine the publishability of qualitative research. While they appear somewhat rigid and similar to the quality criteria for conventional research, they still tend to offer some clarity for researchers.

The first guideline states that the manuscript must have archival significance that advance the knowledge of the discipline. The second one states that the manuscript should have relevant literature and offer information as to the intended contributions of this study. The third guideline suggests that the purpose of the study must be

directly tied to its intended contributions. The fourth one states that the procedures of the study should be carefully laid out so that the process can be clearly understood and evaluated by the reader. The fifth guideline refers to the idea that the results need to address contribution to theory, content, method, and/or practical domains. The sixth guideline states that the limitations of the study must be discussed. This will happen in the last chapter of this study. The seventh one states the manuscript is written clearly and that all technical terms are clearly defined. The eighth one requires that all speculation or assumptions is clearly defined as such. And the ninth guideline for quality research states that the manuscript is acceptable to those reviewers that understand the nature of its content.

2) Positionality- As defined earlier in this study, positionality refers to the notion that all research is "partial and incomplete; socially, culturally, historically, racially, and sexually located; and can therefore never represent any truth except those truths that exhibit the same characteristics" (Lincoln, 1995, p.280). With positionality, we must understand that all texts and understandings are subjective and subject to the

context within which they were written. The subjective nature of the researcher is revealed by the idea of positionality. Positionality demands that this subjectivity is disclosed so that the reader can better understand the context of the researcher. My positionality as a researcher was identified in the first chapter of this study.

3) Community as arbiter of quality- Research in this context is not done for the sake of itself but rather for the good of the larger community, particularly that community through which the research has been done. Much of these ideas are similar to the ideas of liberation theology and pedagogy in which there is a direct responsibility for the research to be for the community and related to the ideals of social action. Within this idea, there is little room for the objective constructs of research. I thought quite a bit about this criterion as I was hoping to understand better my relationship to this work and I was also hoping that it would prove useful and interesting to others who share this profession with me.

4) Voice- Voice as a criterion for quality research examines the voice of the study, answering the questions of "who speaks, for whom, to whom, and for what purposes"

(Lincoln, p.283). Are the voices in the study adequately representing or leaving room for the voices of those who do not have access to the voice of academia? The criteria addressed this concern. "Thus voice not only becomes a characteristic of interpretative work, but the extent to which alternative voices are heard as a criterion by which we can judge the openness, engagement, and problematic nature of any text" (Lincoln, p.283).

5) Critical subjectivity- This criterion addresses the notion that the researcher has an emotional and psychological presence throughout the research process. The researcher is transformed in some way by the experience and content of the research. In critical subjectivity, this emotional and/or psychological transformation is explored.

In exploring my own transformation, I found that I was initially quite anxious about my ability to do good research. I found myself asking participants to "help me with this study". In time, this anxiety decreased and I was able to feel more confidence about the research.

I had picked a research question that was important to me and I was curious about the reactions of others. As a social service provider of the last twelve years, I had

become interested in the humanity of social service today and whether or not it still fit the ideals of the genesis of this work. I also wondered how our professional lives collided or co-existed with our individual humanities. And I saw this question as singular to the professions of human service as these are the people professions of helping, listening, being, and assisting.

In the interviews, this curiosity may have been apparent to the participants. I was so eager to know if they wondered similar things. Besides curiosity, another feeling arose as I heard the stories of these participants. Many of the stories were so warm and respectful that I began to feel excited and rejuvenated about the field of social work. The memories of the participants focused on stories in which the people served were treated with respect and dignity. This helped to renew my faith in the humanity still present in this work. The stories were also rich with details of working with youth and families and I found myself reliving my own beginnings and how my own experiences had led me to where I am today.

This rejuvenation and remembrance assisted me when it was time to analyze the research. The stories connected me so much to my own experiences and who I have attempted to

be in this work. It helped me to remember more readily the humanity around me in my work.

6) Reciprocity- It is important to examine this criterion because of the "person-centered nature of interpretative work" (Lincoln, p. 283). This criterion notes how the researcher and the participant are always in relation to each other and that this relationship is significant to the outcome of the research. The relationship between the researcher and the participant through its potential for trust and caring determines the content of the interview. I thought about reciprocity because I believed that it held the key for having interviews that produced stories rich in detail and meaning. It was important to me that my reciprocity with the participant was one of interest, respect, caring, and trust.

7) Sacredness- This criterion recognizes that there is a sacred or spiritual side to science.

The spiritual or sacred side of science emerges from a profound concern for human dignity, justice, and interpersonal respect...Researchers who conceive of science in this way make space for the lifeways of others and create relationships that are based not

on unequal power, but on mutual respect, granting of dignity, and deep appreciation of the human condition" (Lincoln, p. 284).

The idea of sacredness to me as a researcher is very important. The sharing of respect and dignity offers safety and openings for the voice of the participant.

8) Sharing the prerequisites of privilege- The criterion recognizes the debt that is owed to the participants of the research. The researcher may be able to benefit from the study that results from a shared effort with the participant. I plan to share my results with all of the participants. The success that I will have separately will be the completion of my requirements for my Masters in Social Work. Hopefully, the participants and I together can benefit from the insights gained in this study.

Data Collection

Data collection began with a letter to the participants that explains the study and how it will be conducted (Appendix B). Then a consent form was offered that explained the risks and the benefits of the study. This consent form also explained the confidentiality

guidelines of the information received through the research (Appendix C). A questionnaire was then used to interview participants, which followed the guidelines of hermeneutics as stated in the conceptual framework. This questionnaire was be the instrument through which all of the data was collected (Appendix D). The interview was tape-recorded and the average length was between 30-45 minutes long.

Questions were asked in such a way as to encourage detailed response. Stories that might represent the essence of what a person is trying to articulate were also encouraged. The interview was tape-recorded with the knowledge of the participant.

An exact transcription of this interview was made. The interview transcript was then studied by the researcher. The researcher looked for common meanings of lived experience. An analysis was written that sought to expose meanings or themes from the interview. The written analysis of the interview was then checked by the participant for accuracy. The participant had the option of finding that the interpretations were accurate or they could ask the researcher to amend some of the interpretations to better represent the meaning of the participant. Themes emerged in the analysis that were not

overtly referred to in the interview. The participant had the option of accepting these themes or guiding the researcher to more accurate meanings.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once collected, the data was professionally transcribed. The researcher received the transcript from the transcriber. Since there were be four interviews, there were four transcripts. An analysis was written by the researcher of each of these transcripts. In the analysis, the researcher was looking for themes to emerge. In qualitative research, there is a process called coding which is a process of looking for certain pre-determined words or phrases. In hermeneutics, a different process of coding is used called "naming" which differs in that it looks for patterns of meaning in action. This process is looking for more than specific words or phrases. The researcher of hermeneutics is looking for specific meanings hidden within the words (Benner, Tanner, & Chesla, 1996). The researcher may find themes that are common to all participants, and the researcher may locate themes that might be specific to each subject alone. The researcher attempts to assign meaning to these themes. These meanings

become part of the analysis. The researcher checks the written analysis with the participants for accuracy. They are asked to read it and check the interpretations for accuracy. It is only after the participant approves the interpretations that the analysis can be used.

Brown (1999) establishes eight general standards for good hermeneutic research. These standards are designed to offer guidelines to the researcher as they attempt to produce accurate interpretation of the words of others.

1) The text selected should reflect the practice of life today. This type of research used in social work is for the understandings of today. Validity is further preserved if the understandings happen in a present context.

2) The research should take into account the various cultural traditions and pieces of historical context which are interwoven in the stories of the participants. These different contexts represent the "lifeworld" of the participant and should be recognized as much as possible.

3) The meaning of the participant should be preserved as much as possible by the researcher and should not be distorted by the researcher no matter what the researchers' own personal thoughts are.

4) The analysis reflects the interpretation of the whole and of its parts. The meaning of the whole text is determined by the sum of its parts and the meaning of the parts is determined by the whole. The whole and the parts are relevant to one another.

5) The research searches for an interpretation that is reasonable. The interpreter seeks to look for layers of meaning in the text. It is important not to focus on the literal meaning or what the author calls "arbitrariness in the author's appropriation of communication structures" (p.281).

6) The researcher has some familiarity with the topics that are the subject matter of the text. It would be difficult to analyze or interpret anything if the subject matter is foreign to the researcher.

7) The researcher seeks to establish validity for her interpretations through the informal logic of validation or argumentation. The researcher will have to go through a series of "guesses" to interpret what has been said by the voice of another. In order to establish that the researcher's "guesses" are better than another's interpretations, it is necessary for the researcher to understand these "guesses" critically and to be able to

defend them.

8) The interpretation is clear in the text through the use of language that is ordinary. The researcher is asked to avoid obscure language that reflects only the context of the researcher and obscures the language of the participant.

It is important that the researcher consider these eight standards of good hermeneutic research when writing an analysis that interprets the meanings of another person.

Procedures for Protection

An application of the research design was submitted and accepted by Augsburg's Institutional Review Board (IRB) which looked over the research design for any issues of protection for the participants and assigned it with the #99-36-1.

There is a letter and a consent form found in Appendices A and B that were sent to the participants. These forms were used to both explain the study and offer protection to the participant. The best protection that can be given to human participants in this study was to make sure that they have all available information. Addressing ethical issues in social work, the consent form

and letter make sure of voluntary participation and informed consent (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). These issues are also addressed by the step of allowing the participants to comment on the accuracy of the data collected. The participant does have the option of removing themselves from the research process at any point during the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Findings

This chapter offers interpretations of the four hermeneutics interviews done with social service providers for this research. The interpretations focus on these social service providers' experiences with the people they serve. Four hermeneutics interviews were conducted. Each interview was about 30-40 minutes in length. All of the participants were asked for five different stories and each story was accompanied by a follow-up question that clarified the importance of each story. An analysis was written by this researcher and was returned to each participant for approval before being used as data for this study.

The stories were complex and rich with information. All participants offered stories that were unique and diverse. Yet common themes began to emerge among participants about the kinds of stories they were telling.

What follows is an analysis of the stories told by the participants focusing on the common themes that they shared across the stories.

Story One

The first story asked of the participants was for a time, recent or long ago, that helped them come to the decision to choose work in the social services field. All of the participants told stories from a younger time in their lives. Themes on the power of helping emerged throughout the stories. All of the participants talked about being impacted by powerful examples of helping relationships or the lack of helping relationships in their lives.

The first participant talked about being impacted by the influence and support of a professor at a time when his/her mother was dying.

... And this teacher just became this incredible mentor and she was a social worker.

One was impacted because of helping she/he was able to offer one of her/his peers in high school.

... She was overweight, she was always picked on, and she was considering leaving school, she would go down the hall and people would throw things at her and she wrote me talking about how she was going to leave school and she was a good person inside and nobody would take a minute to see that and what not

and so I wrote her in the paper, I dedicated my whole article to her without using her name and she came back to me at the end of the year and said that even though people may have known who I was talking about, it changed her experience at school.

The third participant felt impacted by helping relationships that were noticeably absent at a crucial time in his/her life.

People that have power put on them to define them, that put them in boxes and categories. I felt like I was in there at one time and I had fight really hard to get outside of that. I don't know what else to say about that, that's what sort of drives me to this....

Helping relationships that were a part of his/her youth impacted the fourth participant.

I just want to be able to drop some seeds can be able to be there to help young people so I just feel like if I was just part of something that made their day or something that made my day... and that's the reason why I just feel like I like to help people because of the things that I've experienced in my life and that was one of the reasons why I am

doing this work now.

As a result of each of experiences that revolved around the issue of helping, decisions were made to pursue social service work as a career path in life. It is interesting to note that three of the participants were influenced by helping relationships that they experienced as young people while one of the participants was influenced by the absence of a helping relationship in early in his life. This participant chose this work because he was able to sense the importance of what he was not given.

The power of helping relationships can be strong. Young and Paulin (1998) state that a positive helping relationship between the worker and the client is the biggest prognosticator of a successful outcome for a client.

Goldstein (1990) talks of the helping relationship as the core of this work; "When we peel back the layers of theory, technique, style, and other characteristics and movement, what we find is two or more human beings engaged in conversation. This is the core of the therapeutic experience" (273-274).

Story Two

The second story asked for a time when the participants had done what they perceived as good social service work. There was an over all theme of partnering and working alongside the people they served. Two of the participants had primary responsibilities as administrators and two were direct service. Three of the participants told of times that had happened early in their careers. And the fourth participant who was an administrator found that the current work is the best and most satisfying work she/he has done.

The three who spoke of their early work told of times when they had fewer responsibilities to any paper or bureaucracy and more time to do just direct service. The other participant felt that her/his time now, 12 years after entering the field is the time when he/her is doing the most satisfying work even though he/her has many more responsibilities than he/her had earlier in his career.

Each story told about good social service work illustrated a time when the participant had worked alongside the people they were serving.

One participant described it as a partnership with his/her client. Her/his story comes from a time when

she/he felt less constrained by professional duties and had a passion to be with people.

... I was content with our relationship and so comfortable with it that we sat there for hours and hours and continued to grow and learn from each other about life experience and who we are today and it was back and forth. It wasn't counseling. It was two people in a car learning about each other and that was social work to me. When we left there, we both knew way more about each other than we ever did and it built a bigger bond and a bigger trust between us.

Another participant welcomed the opportunity to hear and respect the stories that young people were telling her/him. He/she felt that good social work included welcoming the challenge of hearing others, of being questioned, and of looking for unique solutions.

I like the opportunity to learn, to get outside of myself and learn about the rest of the world.

People's different ideas. I love seeing people overcome and succeed in ways I never thought of. I liked being challenged in that way.

And then two participants felt they were doing good

work when they had the least training, at a time when their jobs entailed hanging out with the people they served, offering an ear and some support.

One of the participants felt that this was good work because she/he believed he was genuine, compassionate, and "true to myself".

Just the struggle, just being a young person and just you know, I could relate to them trying to find themselves and it just felt good to know that I could just sit back and just be who I was and never judge anybody and not put judgment on them and just understanding their struggle and I felt like this is the best work I've ever done.

And finally the last participant saw good work as real and genuine connections with clients.

Ironically, it's when I had the least amount of training that I've had to this date, but what I think helped me feel competent or useful is that I felt like I had a very strong, understanding is not a good word, but I felt like I felt very passionate, maybe is a better word, about exactly what I was doing, I felt that I understood that my purpose was not as an advocate, as a therapist or

as a counselor, but really as someone who is there to provide advocacy and support and information and a safe place.

All the participants used the words people, women, kids, etc. to describe the people they have served rather than client. They spoke of relationships that were mutual where there were opportunities to learn from the "client" and understand their struggles. These themes do not suggest that a hierarchy or a feeling of paternalism is desired by these workers. Rather they spoke of relationships that were shared and that honored the strength of those being served.

"Roles that emphasize shared responsibility, where the professional's interventions are with the client are much more promising in cross cultural exchanges" (Durst 1994,p.40). While this quote is attributed specifically to cross-cultural worker-client relationships, it has meaning for all worker-client relationships.

Story Three

The third story was looking for a time of frustration or difficulty associated with social service work. The themes that emerged among all of the stories had

to do with different types of barriers that influenced the work that participants wanted to do with people. It is interesting to note that none of the stories had to do with frustrations had with the clients themselves.

One participant saw these barriers at a beginning level of professional awareness as he/she described an event where he/she power struggled with a young man instead of working with him. He/she had perceived his/her position with this young man as one of power, a professional. The young man saw it differently. The participant came to understand that his/her job title was the only thing that made him/her terribly different from the young man he/her was trying to serve.

It became more about me than him and my agenda became more important than his and what needed to get done because I could have slowed it down and I had the skills to do that, but my agenda became more important to get him to do what (I thought) he needed to do.

Two participants saw the barriers from an organizational level. One of these participants saw the barriers in how organizations can be more concerned about numbers and other types of bureaucracy than about the

people being served.

I see it if you're not being true to the participants and you're just going into the situation trying to get the numbers, then it's not gonna work. But if you go in and you really care about people, then the numbers are gonna come because people, they respect you, you try you know.

The other participant saw oppression in how clients were being described and categorized in ways that seemed to conflict with the social work values of respectful and dignifying service to people.

..and the inconsistency with the code of ethics and why I felt like I became a social worker and the folks for whom I was serving who use my role as really more of a consultant or a business person who had to supply them with the service of a home study in order to get the product of a child was a very different role for me than what I felt like social work should be for me and that was particularly frustrating because where I was at was, that this was social work, and how is it okay as a social worker to discriminate against

folks because of their lack of resources or because they haven't been married long enough or they've struggled with depression and you would not allow the match to an adoption.

And one participant saw the barriers at a societal level as she described the lack of services and understanding available for the homeless young people that she served.

Right now, people (youth) are scrambling to find a job and once they get a job, they can't afford to live, they still can't afford to live, so they either need to (have) lower income housing so that youth can afford it or raise the minimum wage and through my experience I have seen several residents of this program struggle with this.

The experiences that these participants had with barriers to good work point out the structures so often evident in social work that are designed to differentiate, categorize, and separate the "client" from the worker. This process of differentiating and separating has been called clientilism.

Central to the idea of clientilism is the patron-client relationship characterized by, 1) a

distributional system of goods and services based on an unequal or asymmetrical relationship between the a superior patron and an inferior client or client group, and 2) or exchange between patron and client that does not allow the client choices (Cowger, 1998, p. 28-29).

This differentiation happens by the professionalizing of the worker and pathologizing the client. The client categorized by dysfunction depends upon the expertise of the worker to resolve a crisis.

"Clientilism represents a unique type of labeling in a professionalized and specialized society whereby people receive the label and the social role of "client" and, in the process, forfeit a degree of power and independence, (Cowger, 1998, p.30).

Story Four

The fourth story asked for the participants to find a time when they saw others do good social service work. The good work as seen by the participants revolved around three central themes. These were themes of connecting, authenticity, and respectfulness for the people being served. Different words were used sometimes to describe

these themes and not all of these themes made it into each narrative. Yet at least two of the three themes made their way into all of participant's stories.

Two of the participants talked about seeing authenticity in the relationship between the worker and the client. One saw it in the genuine way his/her work partner enters the community and communicates with the residents.

...He shows he's genuine and he's true to people and he just loves to help people and he is not fake about it. One thing that I've learned from this colleague is he's always told me, he says, "be real, stay creative, and you'll go far in this work". Be real with yourself and always stay creative.

Another saw it in the way her/his teammate addressed homophobic comments made by a young person with patience and honesty.

And he walked away again and the kid thought about that again, and half an hour later the kid came back to him and said that he has used the word gay like that for a long time and he had never stopped to think about what he was saying and the thing I admire about that story is that he wasn't telling

him what to say or how to say it. He wasn't telling him that he was a bad person for saying it, he taught him something.

Two of the participants also spoke of the importance of the connections they saw between the worker and the client. One participant was excited when he/she saw this in some of her/his child protection colleagues who she/he felt sometimes see the values and ethics of good practice as not applicable to them because of the nature of their work.

...And being good in that job (child protection) requires just an incredible amount of finesse and a real respect for people because if you went in with absolute respect knowing that you had a job to do and that people didn't always like your job, but if you treated people with dignity and left them that way, then you were successful in that job no matter what the outcome, the social service outcome was necessarily.

Another learned about connections from the practice of a supervisor who taught about thoughtful and patient work.

You ask the right questions and as long as you're connecting, if you are connecting, then you're okay, right? If you do that stuff without

connection, then it doesn't matter, then you're just another person sitting behind a desk or in an interview room or in a group room asking B.S. questions. But if you are connected, then it becomes real. And I saw her do that and teach me how to do that and I watched her, so when I see people do that, it's just like WOW, that's cool.

In her article, One Hundred Years of Innovative Ideas about Practice, Franklin (1998) found that the simple practice of building client relationships, strengths, and self-determination is the most effective way to help human beings solve problems.

For 100 hundred years social workers have believed that human beings have the capacity to change and resolve their own problems. Using the capacity of social workers to foster client relationships, harness their strengths, and look to client self determination is the best method for fostering the change process (p. 214).

Themes of respectfulness move throughout all of the stories from the participants. They are found in all of the stories told of the listening, patience, genuineness, and compassion of the workers described by the

participants.

Story Five

The final story told by participants was in response to question about looking for instances of inspiration that came from the people being served. The themes that arose most significantly from these stories were about the wisdom and goodness within the people being served. The participants talked about the wisdom and goodness they discovered in clients as if they had stumbled on a secret that the rest of society had largely forgotten.

One participant talked about how young people have thanked him/her for the impact she/he has had in their lives even that participant never thought she/he had done much of anything to be that helpful.

I was working in the high schools and I ran the smoking pit you know, so kids could come out and smoke, you know, and this one young man just came up to me and said 'I would never have graduated from high school if it wasn't for you' and I said, 'man I didn't do too much' and he said, 'no, you just listened to me.' And I said, 'wow'.

The other participants focused on examples of clients

being generous and showing wisdom. One example told by a participant who led a group for young mothers. She/he talked about the young mothers giving support to one another in their attempts to resist the violence they had known in their own lives as children.

And they told her that her daughter has a loving mother even though the mother didn't have a loving mother and so this interaction inspired me because they did it on their own, they figured it out on their own and it had nothing to do with charging someone with abuse and telling that parent that they were bad and that their kid was going to grow up to be a bully and all of that. It didn't have anything to do with that. It had to do with learning from your past to decide your future.

Another participant's story came from his/her work with homeless youth in independent living settings. His/her memories of inspiration had to do with young people become organized and through this organization being able to develop a community.

I am just thinking about where I work now at this agency, with this youth community council we have going which is about youth adult partnership and

then you've got staff and you've got residents of this program which are made up of young people, who all involve each other to develop policy and develop how the building's going to run and all of that in challenging one another about biases, about ageism, about sexism and all of that and seeing the young people I work with feel free enough to talk about those things and to challenge the people that are supposed to be providing services to them on their own stuff, that's inspiring, that what I think social services should be.

And finally there was a story of a young woman institutionalized throughout her lifetime who was still able to engage with workers with patience, hope, and honesty.

Really this young woman who had no parents ever and had lived in institutions and grew up in the state hospital which shouldn't happen to anyone really, had a twin that died, this incredible young woman and she had so much optimism and so much faith and goodness and faith in her treaters ...and she's just incredibly gracious about her life experiences and her willingness to really be

present and experience everything that was going on.

Saleebey (1992) states that for social workers to use a strengths approach in their work with people requires an understanding of five assumptions. The first assumption is that all people have strengths that can be used to improve the quality of their lives. The second one states that the motivation to change happens through an emphasis on strengths as understood by the client. The third assumption is that social workers need to have a cooperative and mutual working relationship with clients in order to do strengths work. The fourth assumption is that the worker be able to hear the client's story in a way that acknowledges honorable struggles within perceived deficits. And the fifth maintains that even the "bleakest" of environments contains resources.

These assumptions recognize that people are more than their deficits or the needs that bring them in for services. The goodness and the wisdom within clients can be appreciated and honored by the workers in their lives. All of the participants in this study felt actively inspired by the people they have served. Saleebey (1996) sees this larger perspective as an opportunity for workers to re-

discover the wholeness and the depth of the people they serve.

Discussion

Discussion of the findings happens in three parts. First, the responses to the interview questions are reviewed and the themes that emerged are discussed. Next, there is a look at the distinct characteristics of the stories from each respondent. And finally, there is a discussion of the research questions and what answers were provided by the participants.

Interview themes

While each question elicited different stories from the participants, there were themes evident in the stories that were common to most or all of the participants.

For the stories on what assisted the participants in choosing this career path, there emerged a theme about the power of helping. All participants were so influenced by the power of helping in their lives that it influenced their choice of career. This helping impacted them all on an emotional level and two of the participants remarked on how significant that helping had been in their lives or in

the lives of others.

In the second story where the participants told a story about a time when they themselves had done good work, they focused on themes of partnering with or working alongside the people that they served. Each story reflected a time that they had been with people in a way that was comfortable and a connection had occurred. All of the participants believed that partnering with clients around shared goals were the most effective and respectful way to work with people.

In the third story told about times of frustration, themes about barriers to service came to the front. This was something that each participant saw as getting in the way of their relationships with clients. These barriers were seen on many levels including; societal, organizational, and professional. These barriers were related to the various boundaries, bureaucracies, and clientilism that occur on the societal, organizational, and professional levels of social service. An example of this happened when one of the participants felt that the agency focused more on numbers of clients than they did on the actual needs of clients. Societally, these barriers were the assumptions and biases that are often placed on youth

who are homeless or are parents at an early age by their environment. These biases and generalizations as described by the world around them were seen as impacting these youth and their ability to access opportunity and to feel supported in their attempts to succeed.

Two participants saw organizations as impacting their ability to have relationships with clients. One participant saw the organizational barrier in its obligations to bureaucracy and how that can sometime overshadow the needs of clients. Another participant saw this barrier to relationship in organizations in the way that clients can be categorized and labeled by workers. This process of differentiation or clientilism works to further separate the worker from the client.

And finally, one participant saw barriers in his/her relationship with clients through some of the structures of professionalism that he/she was taught. As a new professional in the social service field, she/he saw her/his role as one of power rather than of relationship. Similar to clientilism, this participant felt that his/her early beliefs about his professional role caused to separate and thus impede his/her ability to make relationships with clients and to serve them well.

The themes that emerged from the fourth set of stories were of good work that participants observed other workers with clients. The ideas of good work came in the forms of authenticity, connection, and respect. Each participant saw at least two of these traits in workers as essential to doing good social service work with people.

And the final theme found in the stories came from stories about clients who had inspired them as workers. All of the participants focused on examples of wisdom and goodness displayed by the people they serve. This theme seems to demonstrate a belief in the strength and the competency of clients as seen by the people who serve them.

All of these themes together suggest that workers want and strive for a mutual relationship with clients. Workers understand that helping is a powerful and worthy thing to do in life. Yet the helping or social service profession is not as simple as a helping hand. It requires that the worker also intends to incorporate integrity, respect, and empathy in relation to clients. The worker has a responsibility to not injure the dignity or the self worth of the client.

Themes of Participants

By looking at the interview of each participant, it is possible to note one theme for each participant that flows through the five stories they told. Participant #1 saw most of her stories through the idea that a partnering relationship with the client is the key to good social service work. Participant #2 focused on the aesthetics of her relationships with clients. She was most interested in appreciating and examining the complexity of these relationships both with herself and with the people she serves. Participant #3 concentrated on accepting the challenge of exploring partnering relationships with clients. Participant #4 believed that the authenticity of the connection with a client is the most important aspect of relationship. While these themes are quite diverse, they all revolve around an interest in the relationship that a worker can have with the people they serve.

It appears that each participant has a different overall theme. However, there are some shared ideas. The participants all recognize a sense of art to the work of helping people. Helping in and of itself can be probably be done by anyone. But there is a depth to this work that

goes beyond helping.

The art of this work is to effectively assist clients as they seek to make changes in their lives. And the worker needs to offer this assistance in such a way as to not only protect the client but to promote a client's dignity and sense of self-worth.

Questions and Themes

There were three research questions for this study.

-What do social service workers believe to be their role as advocate for the people they serve?

-How do social service workers see their relationships with clients?

-What do they want those relationships to be?

The first question explores what social service workers see as their role with the people served. By examining the themes brought forth in this study, it is possible to begin a description of what role that social service workers seek to fill in the lives of the people they serve.

From the themes available, it is possible to see that the role of the social service worker can be twofold. First, the worker can be a helper, willing to assist the

client with a crisis or a difficulty that the client defines. The worker can bring qualities of respect, compassion, honesty, and listening, all of which can be useful at times of crisis. Secondly, the worker can also be a partner with the client through this time of difficulty. The worker recognizes the goodness, wisdom, and complexity of the people they serve. With this understanding, the worker is easily able to work alongside the client to find a solution.

The two roles outlined above seem quite similar to one another. However, there are subtle differences. The worker as helper is called on to assist, offer wisdom, and/or provide direction. Adding the role of partner implies a sense of sharing. The worker intends to understand and empathize with the struggle of the client. They will do more than help. They work alongside the client, seeking solutions from within the context of the client.

None of the twenty stories gathered for this study saw expert or manager as useful roles for workers to have with the people they served. These roles were seen as one-sided and hierarchical. The participants did not see these roles contributing to a trusting relationship between a worker

and a client. More than one story described these roles as potentially damaging to the client-worker relationship.

The next two questions were about the relationship that workers feel they have with clients and what they want those relationships to be?

-How do social service workers see their relationships with clients?

-And what do they want these relationships to be?

The concept of relationship between themselves and the people they serve was seen as important to the participants of this study. They see the development of this relationship as the primary stepping stone to providing effective service to people in need.

The relationship that the participants describe includes the traits of respect, connection, and authenticity. The workers saw these relationships as mutual and saw themselves as benefitting and learning from these relationships. The participants saw these relationships as reciprocal. From their stories arose a perception that clients often contribute as much to us, the worker, as we do to them.

The participants told stories that described instances when they were able to develop partnering relationships

with clients. These relationships were able to utilize the traits of respect, compassion, connection, and authenticity that these participants define as necessary for a helping relationship with someone.

However, the participants also told stories that described barriers to these relationships. These barriers were at many levels and included things such as organizational rigidity, categorization or labeling of people, societal expectations, and professional boundaries.

These barriers were seen as impeding the worker and the client from engaging in a helping, partnering relationship.

The participants were concerned about the barriers that can be found within organizations. An example would be the balance that workers must find between the work that they do with clients and the statistical expectations of the organization. There are times when the needs of the organization are not congruent with the needs of the client. The client may need more time with a worker than an agency is willing to allow due to caseload concerns. Or the client may seek services that the worker could provide but would not meet the grant or outcome requirements of the agency. The client need's coincide with the abilities of the worker, but not with the needs of the organization.

Another barrier within organizations identified by the respondents was the categorization and the labeling of clients for the purposes of insurance or statistics. These practices are often not complementary to the worker's attempts to hear the client's story and to honor their own descriptions of self. An example of this phenomenon is the diagnoses that are often necessary in order for a client to seek reimbursement for mental health services. A person's life can be reduced to a simple description such as; dysthymia. This description merely identifies a category of struggle and inability to cope. It does not take into account the uniqueness of the person described or the ways in which they have been able to resist this description. It categorizes on the basis of dysfunction only.

Another barrier respondents identified is their perception that society has beliefs and expectations about the people who may be in need of social services. These beliefs can further and inaccurately define the client and their needs. These beliefs also have tremendous influence over the services available to people facing difficulties. A service is only available if it fits within society's sense of priorities. For example, this society has currently prioritized work as more important than staying

at home and raising children which was a societal priority during the era of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Therefore mothers who have been raising children on welfare are now directed toward workfare where they are expected to become self-sufficient. Funding then shifts to meet the needs of society's changing values.

The worker can be impeded in their quest to develop a strong relationship with the client and to assist them in accessing resources if society tells a different story about their situation and their needs.

And the last barrier identified by respondents was one of professionalism. The barrier of professionalism can be defined by the concept of clientilism. Clients are differentiated and separated from the worker so as to promote boundaries and limits for the worker. It can also serve to separate the worker in ways that can be seen as artificial by the people being served. Sometimes the concepts of professionalism can be bolstered by concepts of power through knowledge. This thinking promotes the idea that the worker is the expert in the lives of the people they serve. This is often seen as an artificial construct by the client who knows that the worker can not truly know their lives.

However, despite the possibility of professionalism as a potential barrier to the worker-client relationship, it is important to note that the structure of the social work profession is designed to serve the client in a respectful and dignified manner.

The ethical principles of social work echo strongly the beliefs and desires of this study's participants. The code of ethics in social work practice value service, social justice, the dignity and worth of a person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 1996). The ethical responsibilities of the social worker are designed to protect and to ensure the rights of the client. There is a commitment to ongoing education and training. If anything these ethics and standards are more designed to promote the worker-client relationship than they are to add further barriers.

Limitations and Strengths of Study

This study was limited by the small number of participants and the localized geographic region. Also all of the participants are employed by the same agency and are potentially influenced by the stance of the agency. The agency has been non-traditional in approach and has not

been heavily influenced by psycho-dynamic therapies in recent years. The therapeutic approaches currently used by this agency are solution focused and narrative.

Rubin and Babbie (1997) emphasize that hermeneutics is a very subjective approach to research. They caution that researchers must always stay aware of their own perspectives and beliefs as well as staying aware of the beliefs and perspectives of the participants. The researcher needs to establish his or her positionality in order to clarify the potential influence he or she may have over the interpretations. These interpretations will vary from researcher to researcher.

Hermeneutics offers many strengths for researchers who value the collective experiences of people. Noted postmodern philosopher Foucault (1980) asks the questions,

What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instance of your demand: Is it a science? Which speaking, discoursing subjects- which subjects of experience and knowledge- do you want to diminish when you say: I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist? (p. 174)

Hermeneutics is interested in these "nonscientific"

discourses, discourses that are deeply rooted in human experience and narrative. Hermeneutics suggests that the act of scientific inquiry may obscure equally legitimate discourses of personal history. Hermeneutics explores the legitimacy of those experiences.

Hermeneutics as a research tool cannot be utilized in the same way that quantitative methods can be with the numbers of subjects they are able to include. However, it is possible that this study could be done with a wider circle of participants encompassing a larger constellation of specialities and theories of practice. It would be interesting to see the commonalities that would emerge from these stories if told by workers from different areas of social service exposed to different modes of practice. It would also be useful to extend the study to include the stories from different geographic parts of the country. A very interesting use of this study would be to compare the stories told by participants of different cultures so as to further understand the complexity of thought within cultures.

Implications for Practice

Howard Goldstein (1992) suggested that social work functions better as an art than as a science. Social work is work with the needs of humans. In the spirit of that work, social work should honor and celebrate the uniqueness and complexity of what it means to be human. Many social workers and social service workers today question the concept that people easily fit into simple categories of description. The uniqueness of culture and the complexity of history have been long dismissed in an attempt to find ways to explain people and their behaviors.

Hermeneutics is a form of research that focuses on the complexity and uniqueness of the human being. Hermeneutic researchers have the opportunity to recognize and honor the experience of people and believe that there is important knowledge within the narratives that they offer.

This practice is valuable for the future of social work. Social workers and social service workers can expand their opportunities to learn about families from books and theories to the actual practice of listening and exploring the stories brought to us by the families themselves. Social workers and social service workers can consider that these narratives offer more than opportunities to

pathologize and label people. These narratives can hold valuable meanings that can both serve the family and can enrich the experience of social service workers.

This study has found that workers seek a respectful, mutual, caring, and authentic relationship with the people they serve. It was also found that workers were most successful when they partnered with clients in seeking solutions. They also believe that clients can contribute to the lives of workers in a reciprocal way.

In this study, both direct service and administrative people were interviewed. It is interesting to note that there were not significant differences between the responses of administration and those of direct service. They both echoed similar influences and examples of good social service work. They also talked about similar barriers to good work.

These workers were often frustrated by barriers that they saw as limiting their opportunities to have a mutual relationship with clients. And finally, this study found that role and relationship with clients are complex concepts that go far beyond the idea of a helping hand.

The lived experiences of the people who do social work or social service work are rich with understandings and

perceptions. These experiences can add layers to our understanding of this work and to the education of people entering this field. Ideas, feelings, and experiences are brought forth that honors the complexity of what happens in this work. Research of this kind can further enrich our understandings of how to work with people. These understandings can help this profession as it seeks to grow in its quality and efficacy of service to people.

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Appendix A

MEMO

April 19, 1999

TO: Sheila Moriarty

From: Dr. Lucie Ferrell, IRB Chair

RE: Your IRB Proposal

Thank you for your response to the IRB conditions for approval. You have met these conditions and your study, "Social Workers: Their Role and Relationships with the People they Serve," is approved, IRB approval number 99-36-1. Please use this number on all official correspondence and written materials relative to your study.

Your research should provide social workers with valuable insight. I wish you every success in your endeavor.

LF: lmn

C: Dr. Clarice Staff

Appendix B
Information letter

Date

99-36-1

Dear colleague,

For my master's thesis work in social work at Augsburg College, I am doing a study on social service workers and their perceptions of role and relationship with the people they serve. I am interested in what social service workers think and believe about these questions. The stories and unique experiences of social service workers will be the data that will shape this research.

Daily lived experiences will be the information sought for this study. This will happen through a face-to-face interview at a time and a place specified by you. There will be a list of several questions that will take about 60-90 minutes to answer. These questions will be used to seek information about your experiences.

The interview will be recorded on audio tape. The name of the participant will not be recorded on tape. The tape will be identified by a number. That tape will be professionally transcribed. The transcripts will only be identified by a number. The transcripts will be studied by me. No one other than myself will know the names of the participants.

I will look for themes and meanings within your narrative. I believe that your narrative will give us important information about social service workers and our beliefs about our roles and relationships with clients.

An analysis will be written from the interview. This interview will not be diagnosing anything about you. Rather the analysis will be highlighting themes that emerge from the stories you tell.

You will have a chance to comment on the accuracy of

analyses of other social service workers who participate in this study.

All of the information that you offer for this study will be confidential. Your name will not be used at any time after the interview.

My hope for this study is that it will allow social service workers an opportunity to reflect on who we are in this profession. Social service workers generally have very busy and often stressful professional lives. The intention of this research is to give social service workers a chance to talk about this work and who we are in this work.

I hope that you will consider this opportunity to speak with me about your life as a social service worker. If you have any questions, please call me.

Thank You,

Sheila Moriarty

Appendix C

Consent Form

Date

99-36-1

Dear Participant:

Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research project designed to explore the role and relationship that social service workers have with their clients. This study is being conducted as part of my master's thesis in social work at Augsburg college. Participation for this is completely voluntary. I ask you to read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

The study is designed to explore social service worker's perceptions about their role and relationship with the people they serve. This happens through an interview process where the worker is encouraged to talk about experiences they have had with clients. These stories would center around stories that spoke to relationship or role with clients.

Procedures of Study

The study consists of one audio taped interview lasting between 60 and 75 minutes. All interviews will be conducted by the primary researcher. After the interview is finished, I will do an analysis which focuses on the meanings derived from the stories and any themes that may emerge. You will be contacted again and given the opportunity to review the analysis for accuracy. The analysis from your interview will be used as data for my thesis.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality is maintained. Your name will not be shared with anyone. The transcriber will have access to the tapes which will only be identified by a number. The only other person who will have access to the tapes or transcripts will be my thesis advisor, Dr. Clarice Staff. That person will find that the interviews can only

be identified by a study number. The interview tapes will be destroyed at the end of this study which will be August 31, 1999.

Risks and Benefits of the Study

One possible risks for you is if you choose to discuss painful or private memories during the course of the interview. You will not be pressed to share anything that you do not want to share. The possible benefits of this study have to do with honoring the legitimacy of the social service workers perceptions about who we are and who we want to be with the clients we serve. The participant can choose to end their participation in the research at any point in the process.

Contacts and Questions

The interview will be scheduled at a time and a place which is convenient to you. I will be the only researcher for this study. My name is Sheila Moriarty. I can be reached at home. My thesis advisor's name is Dr. Clarice Staff. She can be reached at Augsburg College 1(612)330-1374.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You are also free to refuse permission for the use of your taped interview. If you refuse to end your participation at any time, it will not affect your relationship with The Bridge for Runaway Youth or Augsburg College.

AUTHORIZATION: I, _____, have read the above consent form. My signature here indicates that I give my permission for information I provide to be used for publication in a thesis for the MSW program at Augsburg. This signature also indicates that I have received a copy of the consent form.

Signature_____ Date_____
(Participant)

Signature_____ Date_____
(Researcher)

I consent to be audiotaped:

Signature_____ Date_____
(Participant)

I consent to be quoted:

Signature_____ Date_____
(Participant)

IRB #99-36-1

Appendix D

Interview Narrative

Sample Questions

1. As you reflect on your experiences as a social service worker, can you tell about a time, recent or long ago, that reminds of why you wanted to become a social service worker. I invite you to tell this story. Give as much detail as you can.

Tell me why you chose this story for this question.

What makes this story important to you?

2. I would like you to tell me about another time in your life as a social service worker. Think of a time when you really felt you liked who you were as a social service worker with a client. Some people may think this question is similar to the first. If you think that, I want you to challenge that thought, try to imagine the feelings I am asking for, and see if a story emerges for you.

What was it that you liked best about you as a social service worker?

3. Sometimes social service work is difficult or frustrating. Can you tell me about one of those times in your life. It can be recent or from long ago. Tell me as much as you can about this experience. What elements of this story were particularly frustrating or difficult for you?

Did this experience leave a legacy in your current practice with clients?

4. Think about what you value in good social service work. Tell me if you remember a time when you saw someone practicing social service work with people that you considered good practice. Tell me about what you saw.

Tell me what made that good social service work for you.

5. Can you think of a time when you felt very inspired about social service work with clients by something you saw or heard from the client. Can you tell me that story?

Did this inspiration have any effect on your current relationships with clients? If so, tell me about it.

IRB #99-36-1

Appendix E

Dear Participant #1,

Thank you so much for sharing with me stories of your life in social services. They have been very useful in my quest to understand better the role and relationship that social service workers seek with the people they serve.

In this letter to you, I am going to attempt to give my interpretation of what meanings you intended with your stories. I hope that these interpretations will help me better understand what you believe about the role and relationship that a social service worker can have with the people they serve. I am interested in your feedback to my interpretations, where you think that I have correctly interpreted your meaning and where you think I have misunderstood your meaning. This will help me to better understand the meanings that you intend and will help me to use more accurate information for this thesis. Thank you again for your participation.

In the first question, I asked for a story about a

time in your history that helped you decide to devote your life to social services. You told me a story from high school where as an advice columnist to the school newspaper you received a disturbing letter. The letter was from a young girl who was having many struggles with her peer group. She was feeling isolated and picked on. She stated that she couldn't take it anymore and was going to leave school. She felt like nobody had taken the time to get to know her.

This letter touched you and you decided to devote your entire column that week to her without revealing her name. You attempted to explain the hopes and dreams of the young woman and the experience she was having. You said that at the end of the year, she came to you and told you what a difference it made for her after your column had come out.

You indicated that this had been a powerful experience for you. It seems to also illustrate a good example of how powerful helping can be. Your empathy and actions were powerful enough to have impact on the life of another.

In answering this question, you also spoke of what a natural role it was in your life to offer support to people. You imagined this satisfying piece of your life extending beyond the social and into the professional areas

of your life. When you talked about it, it sounds less like technique or skill and more like a way of being that fits who you are and who you want to be. At one point, you were a part of the business world. You gave people support informally in that setting and you dreamed of doing something different, something that would incorporate these natural skills that you had. You also mentioned that you could imagine doing this for the rest of your life unlike any other job you had which again suggests to me that you see social service work as more than just a profession but as a way of living.

Then I asked you about a story where you liked who you were as a social worker. You responded with an amazing story of how you had helped a young woman from your case load get a driver's license. You described the difficulties she had faced up to this point in getting this license, and then you and she decided to get to the license bureau at 5:30 in the morning so that she would have the best chance to get in. You and she waited for almost 16 hours. During that time, the two of you were able to talk and form a bond with one another. You described that bond as both a friendship and a partnership, and you were comfortable with using those words in describing someone

with whom you also have a "worker-client" relationship.

She had told you about the difficulties she had in her life and how hard it was for her to trust another person. She described to you the ways in which she needed to protect herself in order to avoid getting hurt. It was meaningful to you that she choose to share these pieces of her life with you. One of your last statements in this story was about how two of you were growing together through this experience. It suggests that she had contributed to your life as you had contributed to hers. Here again, you clarify that as a social service worker, service is only one level of the connections you have with the people you serve.

I asked you to tell me a story of a frustrating time in social services for you. You didn't respond with a specific incident. Rather, you talked about the poverty and lack of solid opportunities you see for the homeless youth you serve. You described the immense difficulties they face trying to make it on their own in the Cath-22 world of independent living. You also talked about the violence that is so much a part of the histories and living experiences of these young people. You describe these issues as frustrating because you have empathy for the

struggles of these young people and want to find ways to help them work through their pain. You also indicate concern about how you can balance between serving these young people and also protecting them from each other's pain. In the end, it appears that you have a great deal of recognition of dignity of their struggle and faith in their ability to eventually find some peace.

When I asked you to tell a story about good social service work you saw in a colleague, you responded with a story about co-worker who is gay and dealing with the homophobia of some young people in his care. You described to me how he patiently deconstructed the meanings of the homophobic comments they were making. Throughout the morning, one young person kept returning to the conversation, gaining further clarification each time. Your colleague gently and directly answered each question, the young person finally revealing that he had never thought about the meaning of what he was saying before. You said that you were inspired because you felt that he was an effective teacher with this young person. He went beyond just telling him not to do it. And in the process, he didn't alienate the young person or chastise him.

And finally, you were asked to tell a story about how

clients had inspired you. You told me about a group that you do with young mothers. In the group, you remembered a discussion where one young mother talked about hitting her child. She invoked strong reaction among the other mothers who started to tell her how wrong she was. And then one young mother spoke up and asked her if she wanted her daughter to be raised differently than she herself had been raised. You said that the room went silent and the young mother was able to find herself in that question. She revealed an intention of trying to toughen her child so that she is always able to stand up for herself. Within this honorable intention, she was able to also reveal that she wanted to protect her daughter from the violence of her own history and wanted to be the kind of loving mother that she had missed.

You were awed by the wisdom that they brought to each other. Wisdom that came to them without outside intervention or child protection. I sense a certain pride that you have in realizing how remarkable these young women are and how few people in this society really come to this realization about these young mothers.

You say that experiences like this have taught you not to go in as if the expert. Rather, it has taught you to be

a part of their experiences, to learn from them, to be a witness to their struggle, and to ask questions that you hope will inspire them to understand their path better.

In your view of the role of the social service worker, there is very little hierarchy or distance. You describe the relationship to the person being served to be as significant as the service being offered. Your descriptions of your "clients" are those of young people with astonishing stories of survival. Your descriptions show a great deal of faith in their abilities to make decisions about their lives. Your description of role is often to work alongside as a partner in their struggle. You do not describe your role as that of an authority in their lives.

Your interest in relationship requires that you find time to listen and ask questions. You adapt your work schedule to fit their needs when necessary.

You describe this as a way of being. Something that exists as more than what you do, but as who you are. It is interesting to me that in your stories, you don't describe being tired or overwhelmed by the needs of your young people even though your description of role indicates a great deal of commitment and energy to this work.

It is also very interesting to me that your beliefs about helping evolved from story to story. In the stories of your early experiences you talk of the power of helping that existed within you. In the later stories, you speak of the power of helping in a different way. You are no longer a helper. Rather you are a party to the struggles and growth in others. The power comes from being witness to the emergence of the young person from the struggle. Watching the young person help themselves.

I deeply appreciate being able to share in your experience as a social service worker. Please let me know if I should amend any of the interpretations I have made in this document.

Thank You,

Sheila Moriarty

Appendix F

5/26/99

Dear Participant #2,

Thank you so much for sharing with me stories of your life in social services. They have been very useful to me in my quest to better understand the role and relationship that social service workers seek with the people they serve.

In this letter to you, I am going to attempt to give my interpretation of what meanings you intended with your stories. I hope that these interpretations will help me better understand what you believe about the role and relationship that a social service worker can have with the people they serve. I am interested in your feedback to my interpretations, where you think that I correctly interpreted your meaning and where you think I have misunderstood your meaning. It is important that you offer feedback if any of the interpretations do not sound accurate to you. This helps me have authentic information to use in the thesis. Thank you again for your participation.

The first thing I asked you about was for a story on how you decided to become a social service worker. You told me about a time in college when you didn't know what you wanted to do. This confusion happened at a time when you realized you were a lesbian and generally seemed to be a time of change and discovery. This was also a time of much difficulty as your mother was going through a divorce and then becoming very sick.

You ended up taking a social work class that was recommended to you. You remembered what you read in that class and how it had affected you and you were exposed to a professor who was dynamic and inspirational. All of this steered you into work at a battered women's shelter where you came to know women who were strong and gracious and supportive.

When I asked you what brought you to this story, you told me that you are currently at a point in your career where you have become interested in remembering how you chose this work as opposed to other professions. You had decided that this had not been a conscious choice, but rather something that fit for that moment in time. You describe your mom, her illness and death before you graduated as very pivotal in your career choice of that

time.

It sounds like this is again a time of discovery for you about where you have been and where you are going. I hear you saying that there are many factors that make up the directions that happen for people. Some are related to choices, or changes in the environment around us, and some are the chance intersection of any of these many factors.

Then I asked you about a time when you liked who you were as a social service worker. You talked about a time early in your career when you were working at the battered women's shelter. It was a time when you were least trained to do this work. Yet it was also a time when you felt a great deal of passion for what you were doing. You described having less of a professional understanding of who you were in this work. You saw your role as someone who supported, advocated for, and listened. It was a time when you felt that your values as a professional were consistent with what your values were as a person.

You had some very interesting thoughts about how becoming more professional hindered you in some ways. You seem to associate this with some of the pressure on professions to know more and more. You had enjoyed that time when you didn't know so much and didn't feel pressure

to know about other people. The knowing, the need to have answers, and to be different as you become more professional seems to have competed with the passion that you felt when you started at the shelter. You liked it best when you didn't have answers for people. Instead you had time, energy, empathy, and passion.

What you reported liking best about this time was feeling like you were doing work that was valuable and important and that who you were professionally and personally was consistently the same. You seem to view the synchronization of personal and professional values as very important to satisfaction in your work. Conflict between those two sets of values may make it difficult for you to preserve your integrity.

When I asked about a time in social service work that has been very frustrating, you told me about your time as an adoption social worker. You felt that you were often in conflict with what social service work should be about. There were many rules and regulations that seemed to indicate that there was a formula about who could adopt and who could not. The formula included measures about money, status, family type, and other factors. Some of these measures suggested to you discriminatory or elitist

practices. Which you saw as contrary to the ethics of social work as you understood them. Again here is an example where your beliefs were in possible conflict with the duties of your job. You found it interesting that so many of your colleagues were not able to see this conflict as clearly as you did. They seemed to be comfortable with the idea of categories, and their ability to know good parenting.

How this has become a legacy for you is unclear. It is interesting that you continue to see your role as a social worker to always question who you are and what you are doing with the people you serve despite the fact that many of the colleagues that you have worked with have not shared that role.

The next question I asked you was for a story about good social service work. While you didn't have a specific story, you did have a very clear idea about what good social service work is for you.

Good social work for you is about respect and compassion and honesty. At one point you say that sometimes people can just "sit back and be compassionate." That brings me back to your thoughts about professionalism and how that often calls for structures and answers rather than

respectful human contact. You also mention that the mandates of certain jobs such as child protection often leave workers with the impression that they are excused from some of the values of social work practice. You suspect that workers who still employ these values despite mandates to investigate find a balance that produces social work that is strong, good, and very possible. As you state, the goodness of the relationship can and, in many cases, should be more important than the goodness of the work.

And finally, when I asked you about something inspirational you saw or heard from a client, you told me about a young woman you had worked with in a mental health center. She had been institutionalized many times for years and was in her early 20's. In her life, there had been many traumas. She carried labels and diagnoses and was having a difficult time transitioning into an independent life.

You were allowed to work with her because she was not interested in traditional therapy. For a year, she talked to you about her life, what had happened and what was happening. You seemed to be amazed with the resilience and the goodness in this young woman. You saw her as being

very gracious about her experiences despite long years of trauma and institutionalization. You learned that everything with people is not how it seems. We are each so individual and complex. Her wisdom and goodness was surprising to you as it was not something you would expect.

Yet it was there and it was her. And this story offered the impression that not only is the human spirit amazing but the discovery of the human spirit in this work is amazing and adds such complexity, hope, and beauty to the overall story of the person. Your story of this young woman suggests to me that she taught you to look for the human spirit in the work that you do.

Several themes come up for me from your interview. You appear to be deeply involved in the aesthetics what this work can be. Social work as an art has much more meaning to you than does social work as a science. For you social work is structured around the values and the ethics rather than the profession and its bureaucracy. Social work is the relationship not the task.

In art rather than science, meanings are diverse and endlessly complex. As an aesthetic of social work, you appear to constantly look at and reveal further meaning to the work that you do and question the work that does not

fit with your understanding of what social work should be.

All of this questioning and searching may leave you in flux as to who you are and where you are going as these tasks can and should never be fully completed. And so your journey through this profession or mission or calling will be a forever complex one through which the aesthetics of your social work will grow.

Thank you so much for the time you have given me for this thesis. Please let me know what fits for you in these interpretations and what does not so that I can use these themes for the work that I do.

Thank You,

Sheila

Appendix G

Dear Participant #3,

Thank you so much for sharing with me stories of your life in social services. They have been very useful in my quest to better understand the role and relationship that social service workers seek with the people they serve.

In this letter to you, I am going to attempt to give my interpretations of what meanings you intended with your stories. I hope that these interpretations will help me better understand what you believe about the role and relationship that a social service worker can have with the people they serve. I am interested in your feedback to my interpretations where you think that I have correctly interpreted your meaning and where you think that I have misunderstood your meaning. It is important to me that these interpretations fit with what you believe to be true about your thoughts and feelings. It will help me to be as accurate as possible when I use these interpretations as

data in my research. Again I thank you for your participation.

In the first question, I asked you for a story that tells me how you came to choose this work. Your story goes all the way back to when you were young. You had the experience of being labeled in school. You learned differently than other kids and were also very active. As a result of this label, you ended up in special classes. Others held the power to define you and categorize you. Around this evolved a definition of who you were that wore heavily on you in time.

This had an impact on your life. You want people to understand that everyone is different and we are all unique. And these differences do not necessarily call for us to be separated or isolated from others. The need to expose this seems to have brought you into this work. You have never forgotten the struggles you had as a young person.

There is also a theme in your story about how society always focuses on the individual. Any dysfunction or difference can be rectified within the individual. There is little focus on the larger or more global factors that may have impacted what is happening with the individual.

There is the idea that you are the problem rather than seeing the problems that are the environment around the person. You seem to have some drive to combat this.

In the second question, I was looking for a story about a time when you felt good about the work you were doing. You quickly responded with now as a time when you are feeling good about this work. You feel that all the previous years in this work have seasoned you for now. History has taught you and you have learned from your mistakes. You are surrounded by a strong team of people who have worked hard alongside you and have always cared enough to be honest with you.

You feel good about who you are currently in this work and you feel particularly challenged at this time in your career. You seem open to immersing yourself in the stories told by young people. You are hoping to honor these stories with your attention and your interest.

You talk about being challenged a lot. It is very interesting. You view challenge as exciting and invigorating. And I don't hear any fear or anxiety attached to it. You appear to see challenge as the backbone of your growth.

I asked you for a story of a time when you felt

frustrated in this field. You talked about a time early in your career when a young man threatened you and you responded in a way that set up a power struggle. With the resulting bruises you also learned a lesson. You learned just how much of yourself you carry in this work. Your choices in any given moment can influence the shape of your interactions. I hear you saying that much of your work is about you, the choices you make, and why you choose them. Sometimes these choices are critical, so very few things really have to be approached at a dead run. It is important to step back, think about who you are, who they are, and what they are asking for.

There is one moment in your story that stands out. It is when you say, "I was 19, he's 17, we're basically the same age....". It suggests to me that you see job titles as often the only pieces that separate us from one another.

I wonder if you think that the people we serve often understand this better than we do.

I asked you to think about a story where you have seen good social service work. You didn't have a specific story. The question, however, brought you back to a time when you were new in this work. You were a residential counselor at The Bridge. Your supervisor was a woman named

Deb who taught you many things about what good social service and crisis work could be. You learned a lot about patience and taking the time to get to know other people. You learned about listening to other people and thinking about your own biases and agendas. She taught you to slow down and develop relationships with the people you were serving.

The word you used was connecting. You said that when you do not connect with the person you are serving, you are doing nothing more but being yet another worker behind a desk asking questions that have no meaning for the person being served. The message for you about good social work is that connection is everything. You stated that "Social service work is about people..." And it is about recognizing the individual life of each person. Offering respect and dignity to the uniqueness of each person you serve can be the biggest gift that you give as a social service worker.

Finally I asked you to tell a story about something that you saw from the people you served that was inspirational for you. You felt like you had many stories to offer about how "clients" have inspired you. You were not able to settle on a specific one although you did talk

with pride about the youth community council developed at the agency where you are working currently. This agency is a 33 unit apartment complex for independent living youth. You talked about how these young people have come together to develop the structure for how the program will be run. You hear them talking about issues such as ageism, racism, and sexism. And you see them challenging each other in an effort to build a strong community.

You see this as leaving a strong legacy in the work that you do. It returns to an earlier thought of how much more connects social service workers to the people they serve than separates them. You see social service work as a collaboration between the worker and the person being served. It is a collaborative relationship that the worker has to offer.

Challenge is a concept that you return to again and again in your answers. Challenging yourself to do strong and respectful work is a constant theme. The challenge that you describe is to listen and to connect with the young people in your work. It is to constantly search for ways to work with them and through them and their perceptions of change. These challenges that you have accepted seem to infuse you with energy. You seem not only

to welcome them, but you speak as if the acceptance of them is essential to any potential for growth in this field.

To you, relationship with the person being served is the primary tenet of this work. This relationship should be one of respect of the person and interest in their story. It is through this story that solutions will emerge.

It is your role to be curious about parts of the story that exist outside the primary tale of dysfunction and failure.

There is increasing depth to the stories that signal the early days for you in this work and then the more recent times. You came to know about the importance of connection early in your work. As the stories become more recent, you have added lessons of walking alongside the people you serve and working from their understanding of life. You have also added the importance of challenging ourselves to grow through our work with people.

Thank you very much in taking time to share with me your understanding of the role and relationships that social service workers have with the people they serve. Please let me know if I should amend any of the interpretations I have made in this document.

Thanks, Sheila Moriarty

Appendix H

Dear Participant #4,

Thank you so much for sharing with me stories of your life in social services. They have been very useful to me in my quest to better understand the role and relationship that social service workers seek with the people they serve.

In this letter to you, I am going to attempt to give my interpretation of what meanings you intended with your stories. I hope that these interpretations will help me to better understand what you believe about the role and relationship that a social service worker can have with the people they serve. I am interested in your feedback to my interpretations, where you think that I correctly interpreted your meaning and where you think that I have misunderstood your meaning. Thank you again for your participation.

The first thing I asked you about was for a story on how you decided to become a social service worker. You talked to me about your grandmother. You told me that your

grandmother provided foster care to many young people over the years yourself included. She was a positive influence, helping others and being very involved in the community around her.

You used the phrase "positive energy" in this story. I wonder if it is an important description for you. You talk about the positive actions that you were able to observe your grandmother do and how useful that was for you to see as a young man. You saw your grandmother's positive energy having an effect on others and it came to you at some point that you could have that same power to "drop seeds" and be a part of something.

You also say that you were "blessed" to be a part of programs designed to offer opportunities and activities to young people. This became an alternative to some of the activities in the area that were seen as negative for young people.

At the end of your story, you say that your grandmother's influence helped "groom" you for this work. This influence and early exposure to helping leaves you sensitive to the struggles of the people around you.

Then I asked you to think of a time when you really liked who you were in this work and to describe what it was

that you liked about yourself in this work. You told me about a time when you were first beginning this work. You were in the schools at this time doing groups. You described spending a lot of time hanging around young people. There seemed to be a great deal of respect in your comments as you described how good young people are at knowing if you are genuine or caring. You were able to go in and be yourself and they could relate easily to you.

You talked about your identity as an African American male and your own journey of discovery of who you are and what you want out of life. You make a connection between having a strong identity and being able to relate easily with people. Your strong sense of self allows you to sit back and not be judgmental or concerned about how people viewed you. In this story you suggest a formula that has worked for you in doing good social service work. It is to recognize the goodness of your soul and to be true to yourself. You see this as a formula for good work that young people understand and appreciate. You also indicate a belief that knowing yourself and having some peace with that self is connected to the work that you do.

I asked for a story about a time that was particularly frustrating or difficult for you. You told me that the

frustrations that you have with this work has not been caused by the clients. It has generally happened because of the organizations and how they see this work. Some organizations can truly see the people they serve and others are more concerned with numbers and other types of bureaucracy. You talk about the barriers that happen for your work as a result of this second type of organization. You talked about feeling and understanding the struggles that peoples have, people from different backgrounds, countries, and cultures. And then you talked about how wonderful it would be to have an organization of your own that could truly focus in on that.

You described yourself as an internationalist. This is an interesting term. You appear to recognize yourself as someone who understand that struggle happens in many different forms and in many different places. You called yourself a "believer in people". This suggests a faith in people and a goodness in people that may not always make itself immediately apparent. This seems to be a lovely way to think and feel about people in this work.

The fourth story I asked for was about a time that you observed someone else doing good. I am interested in what you saw. You talked about your outreach partner and how he

is able to move comfortably throughout the community. People understand him to be a genuine and helpful person. His advice to you has been, "be real, stay creative and you will go far in this work."

Your partner is sometimes in communities where he is not familiar to others and these are communities that do not often trust strangers. Yet he has been able to convince people with his genuineness. They understand what he is trying to do in their community and you see this as a sign of respect for him.

Finally I asked you to tell me a story about how you have been inspired by the people you serve. You told me about young people who have approached you and said that they have graduated because of you. You feel the deep impact of that kind of statement. It means that you have truly passed on something meaningful to another person.

I suspect that this positive energy that you passed on to another person didn't necessarily happen at times when you were making the most amount of money or had the biggest job responsibilities. The most powerful weapons for this work that you have discussed in this interview have had to do with your ability to be genuine, to listen, and to appreciate the struggle of the person in front of you. You

distinguish this work from corporate America. This is work that you have to feel in your heart in order to do it effectively.

Throughout this interview, you have referred to concepts that have defined for you how good social service work can happen. All of them are concepts that can not be taught so much as they are felt or experienced. Your grandmother and the legacy she has left you is an example of this. You learned about the power of positive energy from being around her and wanting to carry on the legacy of what she has started.

Knowing yourself and having a love for self is another concept that you see as important in being able to do effective work. You suggest that knowing yourself offers you the opportunity to see the environment around you with a clarity of vision.

Being real, being yourself or being genuine are concepts that reveal themselves over and over throughout this interview. You suggest that this is what our clients are looking for in their relationship with us.

And having a belief in people is very important to you as well. You seem to have faith that the goodness in people will reveal itself if you are present and willing to hear

their struggle.

These concepts appear to me to be what describes who you are and want to be in the relationships you have with the people you serve. You define your role as being with people, present in who you are, and open to hearing what they need. Throughout this interview, you see examples of good solid social service work that can happen without formal training. You see this work as more about what is in your heart than about what has been put into your head.

Thank you so much for the time you have given me for this thesis. Please let me know what fits for you in these interpretations and what does not so that I can use these themes for the work of this project.

Thanks,

Sheila

Augsburg College
Lindell Library
Minneapolis, MN 55454